

Understanding Emotional Eating



Image: Cup Cake Comfort

We probably all know what it's like to comfort eat. Our food choices and eating habits often change when we are stressed, sad, dissatisfied, lonely or bored. The type of hunger influenced by our emotions is different from an actual physical hunger and stems from a belief that certain foods will give us comfort and something to distract us from our thoughts. This can happen without us being consciously aware of it.

When we experience different types of stress, our body isn't able to differentiate between them, it will respond the same way in the face of an argument as it does to any physical stress. Cortisol is released and blood glucose rises but it is quickly stored mostly in fat tissue, if it is not used up through exercise. This sudden drop in glucose will have your limbs reaching for simple carbohydrates and sugars to restore balance. If this happens on a regular basis, you will experience increased appetite with cravings for sugar and other simple carbohydrates as well as a steady weight gain around the waistline.

There are ways to help combat this cycle by being aware of when you have been triggered and want to eat for comfort. Eating in this way only serves to bury the feelings we are trying to avoid, and so, the next time something happens and you notice that you are grabbing for chocolate or other sweet foods, see if you can try some of the following tips to support you instead.

- Try and sit with whatever it is that is triggering you. You may want to write it down, talk to someone or ponder on what you are being challenged by.
- Do some gentle breathing until you feel more settled and the thoughts have slowed down.
- Change your movements, have a little stretch and try not to give too much focus to the emotions.
- Take yourself out into nature where you have the time to reflect and resettle yourself if you need to.
- Take a walk to help balance your blood glucose levels and relax your body and mind.

Always give yourself the space to observe what is going on for you behind the scenes and if you find yourself still going for the food, make sure you don't give yourself a hard time. After all, there will be plenty more opportunities ahead.

Naturopath, Affordable Wholefoods